

even know his letters, Madame Aubert, his grandmother, sensibly decided to select a preparatory school. One was found near the Notre Dame gate, from which it derived its appellation of Pension Notre Dame. It was kept by a worthy and indulgent pedagogue, named Isoard, who after infinite trouble — for the boy was stubborn and bitterly regretted his careless life in the open air — contrived to teach him to read the Fables of La Fontaine. It was at this time that young Entile formed his earliest life-friendships; he became attached to two of his school-fellows, one of whom, Solari, a sculptor of distinguished talent, is still alive, while the other, Marius Eoux, acquired a passing reputation as a "popular" novel writer.¹ These two were Zola's usual play-mates at marbles, tops, and leap-frog, his first companions also in the rambles in which he began to indulge.

For some reason or other, Madame Zola and the Auberts moved from the Impasse Sylvacanne to the Pont-de-Berauc, in the open country, on the road to Toulon, and then young Smile had fields before him with a picturesque stream, the Torse, so called on account of its capricious windings — "a torrent in December, the most timid of rivulets in the fine weather/" as he called it afterwards in his "Contes a Ninon."

And the charms of the country, the inviting
banks of the
Torse, often made a truant of him, — a truant
who remained
unpunished, for as his grandparents generally
said: " It was
not right to cross the poor fatherless boy."

The position of the family was now, however,
becoming
difficult. The widow's savings were
dwindling away in

¹ Among his works, which in the first instance generally
appeared *o^feuil-*
letons in Paris newspapers, were " Eugenie Lamour," " Francis
et Mariette,"
"* Les Manages Jannes," and "Evariste Planchu, Mceurs
Yraies du Quartier
Latin," the last named being perhaps his "best book.